

**MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES**  
**Interim Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel**  
**to Oxfordshire County Council**

**SEPTEMBER 2025**

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Summary**

- A. The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) has begun its full review of the County Council's scheme of Members' allowances and will present its report to the Council later in the current Council year which will recommend a further Scheme of Allowances effective from 1 April 2026. The IRP was asked by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to consider two specific matters initially and provide recommendations to the Council in advance of the full review. These matters relate to the payment of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) to the Leaders and Shadow Cabinet Members of the two equally sized opposition groups recognised as the official opposition and allowances for Members taking parental leave.
- B. The Members' Allowances (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 requires that Councils shall have regard to the recommendations of its Independent Remuneration Panel when making or revising a scheme of allowances. Any decision not to follow the IRP's recommendations must be published. Consequently, Council should consider and have regard to the IRP's recommendations, but it is for Council itself to agree any amendments to the scheme.
- C. In summary, the IRP has concluded that the current level of SRAs does not proportionately reflect the scope and scale of the responsibilities of multiple opposition groups. They consider that payment of the full SRAs specified in the scheme of Members' allowances cannot be justified on the grounds of the impact on the Council's budget, and perception by the public of this increased expenditure. The IRP's opinion is that there is potential for more-cross party working by the two opposition groups in holding the administration to account and contributing to democratic debate.
- D. The IRP also considered the Members' parental leave policy approved by the Council on 8 July 2025. The IRP concluded that the payment of all allowances including the payment of any Special Responsibility Allowances to which a member was entitled, should continue during a period of parental leave taken by a councillor in accordance with the policy.

## **Principles Adopted**

- E. The IRP had been asked by the Monitoring Officer to consider the payment of allowances arising from two recent decisions: -
- a) The recognition of two official opposition groups by the Monitoring Officer following the County Council Elections in May 2025. The Labour and Co-operative Group and the Oxfordshire Alliance Group were formed of an equal number of 12 members and were tied as the second largest political groups on the Council.
  - b) The Council approved a Members' parental leave policy in July 2025 and asked the IRP to confirm that the payments of any allowances payable should continue to be paid to any member taking parental leave.
- F. The Council's procedures regarding opposition groups are set out in section 9.2 of the Constitution (Protocol on Members' Rights and Responsibilities). The IRP noted that Oxfordshire County Council was among a minority of authorities that recognised an "official" opposition group within its constitutional provisions. They also noted that there was no provision within the Council's current allowance scheme to determine SRA payments if there was more than one official opposition group on the Council. The IRP asked officers to undertake a research exercise to identify the approaches taken by other authorities in circumstances where there was an equal number of members in two or more opposition groups.
- G. The benchmarking research revealed that a number of approaches were taken by individual councils to the payment of allowances to more than one opposition group. Some authorities divided the Special Responsibility Allowances between the Leaders and members of opposition groups. Other councils had devised a specific formula which applied a percentage of the allowances paid to the Leader and Cabinet members to Opposition Leaders and Shadow Cabinets.

## **Considerations by the Independent Remuneration Panel**

- H. The IRP considered the financial implications for the Council's budget. The current scheme of Members' allowances provided for the following specific SRAs: -

Leader of the Opposition Group - £14,268  
Each Shadow Cabinet Member - £3,576.

The IRP noted that the payment of these allowances to two opposition groups had resulted in growth to the budget of £47,328 in 2025-26. The IRP considered the future impact of the current approach should there be any number of opposition groups with equal numbers in the future. Their view was that this position was not sustainable because of the impact on the Council's expenditure and the public perception of maintaining this growth in the budget especially in the absence of a mechanism to determine the payment of SRA's in these circumstances. They also considered that the status of two recognised opposition groups presented an opportunity to hold the Council's administration to account through collaboration and cross-party working.

- I. The IRP concluded that, in the event of there being two or more opposition groups at any one time, the specified SRAs for the Shadow Leader and Shadow Cabinet Members be divided by the number of groups given opposition group status. The opposition group/s should only be allocated the appropriate proportion of the allowance to each shadow cabinet member they appointed, regardless of the total number of those positions within each group.
- J. The IRP also considered the question of allowance payments to Members taking leave under the provisions of the parental leave policy agreed by the Council at its meeting on 8 July 2025. Members were of the view that any allowances to which these Members were entitled should continue during the period of parental leave in line with the Council's adopted policy and the model policy provided by the Local Government Association.

## **Recommendations**

- a) **We RECOMMEND that, in the event of the designation of two or more opposition groups of an equal number that are the next largest groups to that of the administration, the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for Opposition Group Leaders and Shadow Cabinet Members specified in the Members' Allowances Scheme should be divided by the number of groups accorded with that status. This amendment to the scheme should come into effect on 1 October 2025**
- b) **We RECOMMEND that the basic and Special Responsibility Allowances for Members taking parental leave in accordance with the Council's policy should continue to be paid during their period of leave and in making this recommendation it is accepted by the IRP that there may be an instance where a Special Responsibility Allowance may be duplicated for a limited period of time.**

**Dave Shelmerdine**  
**Chair, Independent Remuneration Panel**

**On behalf of:-**

**Members: Ben Anim-Antwi,  
Martyn Hocking  
Stephen Mckechnie**

**September 2025**